



Department of  
Veterans Affairs

# DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGIC PLAN FOR FY 2009-2013

*A framework  
for creating and sustaining  
a diverse workforce.*

**Office of Diversity and Inclusion**

February 2009



## MESSAGE FROM THE DAS

**D**ear Colleagues:

It is with great pride that we present the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) first *Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan* (Plan). This Plan, developed in collaboration with VA's Administrations, Staff Offices, and many other stakeholders internally and externally, serves as a living roadmap to guide our efforts in making VA a leader in creating and sustaining a high-performing workforce that leverages diversity and empowers all employees to achieve superior results in serving our Nation's Veterans.

The *Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan* is specifically aligned with VA's strategic objective to "recruit, develop, and retain a competent, committed, and diverse workforce that provides high-quality service to Veterans and their families." VA is the second-largest of the 15 Cabinet departments, with over 280,000 employees in its ranks all working to fulfill President Abraham Lincoln's promise: "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan." As a major health care and benefits provider, VA must maintain a workforce that is reflective of the communities it serves.

The Plan was developed with the underlying mission in mind: "to foster a diverse workforce and inclusive work environment that ensures equal opportunity through national policy development, workforce analysis, outreach, retention, and education to best serve our Nation's Veterans." It is designed to achieve three over-arching goals:

- 1) Create a diverse, high performing workforce that reflects the communities we serve by identifying and eliminating barriers to equal opportunity;
- 2) Cultivate an inclusive workplace that enables full participation through strategic outreach and retention; and
- 3) Promote accountability, education, and communication on diversity and inclusion matters with VA employees, leaders, and stakeholders to facilitate outstanding service to Veterans.

In order to be a high-performing organization in the 21st century, we must define diversity in its broadest context, including but not limited to the legally protected classes. Diversity must encompass all that makes us unique, including the diversity of thought and perspective that accompanies our human identity. Only then can we realize the full performance potential and competitive advantages of a diverse workforce. This is more than a legal or moral imperative, it is the business case for diversity that we in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion will also champion.

The implementation of this *Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan* reflects the Department's continued efforts to improve service to our Nation's Veterans. As a public service agency, diversity and inclusion must be the cornerstones of our human capital management strategy. Working collaboratively with you—the highly-dedicated employees, managers, and stakeholders of VA—we will seize the challenges and opportunities to create and sustain a diverse and inclusive workforce that best serves our Nation's most precious assets—our Veterans.

We invite you to join us in this important journey. Thank you for your support.

*Georgia Coffey*

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diversity and Inclusion  
Department of Veterans Affairs



## FOREWORD

**I**n 2008, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI), formerly the Office of Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity, embarked on strategic planning initiative for the office—the first of its kind in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The intent was to develop a leading edge, living road map for incorporating diversity and inclusion in the VA based on the best practices in the public and private sectors.

The public sector is on the cusp of a major transformation that presents us with great challenges and even greater opportunities in the area of workforce diversity and inclusion. As we witness the dramatic effects of the globalization of our economy, never before has it been more critical that we adapt to the rapidly changing profile of our global marketplace. The viability of agencies in the 21st century will depend on their ability to service an increasingly diversified market through a strategically managed workforce that reflects the global community it serves.

As a result of extensive benchmarking, it was revealed that the field of equal employment opportunity (EEO) and diversity management had changed dramatically since its statutory inception in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In the 1970s, EEO evolved into Affirmative Action; in the 1980s, it expanded into “respecting differences”; and in the 1990s, it was transformed by the groundbreaking work of Dr. R. Roosevelt Thomas who introduced the concept of “diversity management.” With each of these iterations, the concept of EEO moved from a reactive, exclusively legalistic model to a more proactive, business-driven paradigm.

The millennium has also ushered in a new framework. In recent years, the focus has shifted from diversity to inclusion, a rapidly emerging trend born in the private sector. This sea of change occurred quietly as companies found themselves vigorously competing for diverse workforce talent in a globalized economy. They soon realized that it was not enough to simply recruit a diverse workforce, but they must also retain and leverage that diverse workforce to advance the mission.

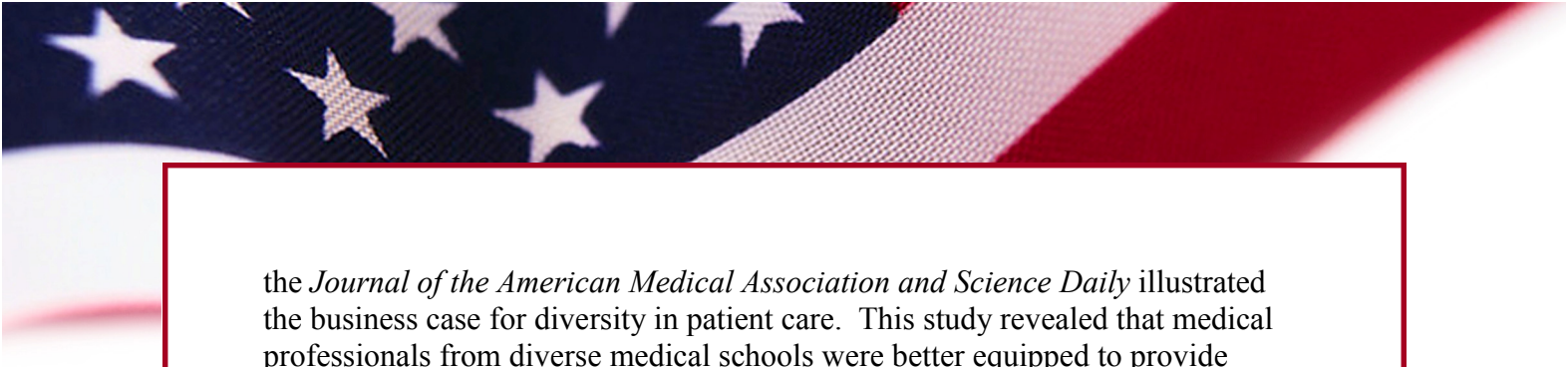
Companies began looking internally at the organizational culture and the institutional processes that impacted employees’ ability to fully participate and contribute to the goals of the organization. This required examining systemic barriers to inclusion in all aspects of the organizations: cultural norms, business

practices, communications, leadership development, training and education, performance management, management accountability, strategic recruitment, and work life. Organizational inclusion became the means to actualize the potential of workforce diversity.

The term “diversity and inclusion” reflects the emerging need to complement diversity practices which focused largely on recruitment outreach, with internal retention strategies to sustain, develop, and leverage the diversity in all human resources. The concept of inclusion galvanized the field of diversity management by stressing inclusion of *all* employees, not just legally-protected classes. Through inclusion, organizations create the facilitating conditions in the work environment that enable the competitive advantages of diversity to flourish. This relatively new terminology of “diversity and inclusion” supports the *business case for diversity*, a concept championed by ODI. The business case spoke to the higher performance outcomes associated with workforce diversity and inclusion.

In championing this “*business case for diversity and inclusion*,” we rely on the research in this area. Empirical studies have shown that workforce diversity offers quantifiable advantages to organizational performance and productivity. Specifically, studies show that under facilitating conditions, workforce diversity is positively correlated with higher performance outcomes and greater economic returns. The Diversity Research Network conducted a major study on Fortune 500 companies and found that racial diversity was positively associated with higher performance outcome measures in organizations that “integrate and leverage diverse perspectives.” It also found that gender diversity yielded more effective group processes and performance in organizations with “people-oriented” performance cultures. Research is demonstrating the strong link between perceptions of fairness in the workplace and employee engagement. This speaks to the need for strategies that support “inclusion” as well as diversity in the workplace.

The renowned Center for Creative Leadership conducted a large scale study on team dynamics and work productivity which revealed that diverse teams were more creative and performed better than homogenous teams. The study team analyzed employer and employee data of over 20,000 business establishments in the manufacturing, retail, and service commercial sectors. The results showed that racial and gender diversity was positively correlated with establishment productivity, product quality, and economic return on investment. Similarly, in 2004, the Urban League reported that diverse companies generated 18 percent higher productivity than the U.S. economy overall. Finally, a study published in



the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and *Science Daily* illustrated the business case for diversity in patient care. This study revealed that medical professionals from diverse medical schools were better equipped to provide better patient care in a diverse society. Here again, empirical data illuminates the nexus between workforce diversity and higher performance outcomes in the health care field

While the private sector is in the business of profits, government is in the business of equity—equity of service, protections, opportunity. The same benefits apply in this context and the stakes are even higher. As a major health care and benefits provider, VA must maintain a workforce that is reflective of constituencies it serves so it can provide high quality, responsive, and equitable services. This is not only a matter of legal compliance, but smart business.

It is important to note that the business case for diversity in no way diminishes our commitment to the legal and social imperatives for equal opportunity. VA remains unequivocally committed to ensuring the statutory protections for equal employment opportunity as prescribed by law. In fact, the social imperatives are strengthened by the business case. The business case is predicated on the value of diversity of thought—which is rooted in our human diversity. It is the inseverable link between diversity of thought and our human diversity that makes equal opportunity in the workplace essential.

ODI defines diversity in its broadest context to include all that makes us unique: race, color, gender, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, age, disability, culture, educational background, socioeconomic status, intellectual perspective, organizational level, and more. By doing so, we are able to harvest the full performance potential and competitive advantages diversity has to offer. We are proud to lead the effort to promote policies in VA operationalize this concept so that we can provide superior service to our Veterans and all Americans. To that end, we present to you VA's inaugural *Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan for FY 2009-2013*.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Mission**

The mission of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) is to foster a diverse workforce and an inclusive work environment that ensures equal opportunity through national policy development, workforce analysis, outreach, retention, and education to best serve our Nation's Veterans.

### **Vision**

It is the vision of ODI that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is a leader in creating and sustaining a high performing workforce by leveraging diversity and empowering all employees to achieve superior results in service to our Veterans.

### **Values**

We serve our Nation's Veterans. We are committed to pursuing the agency's mission and fully utilizing the creativity, energy, and diversity of our workforce. To this end, we hold ourselves to the values of respect, trust, and responsiveness to promote a culture of performance excellence.

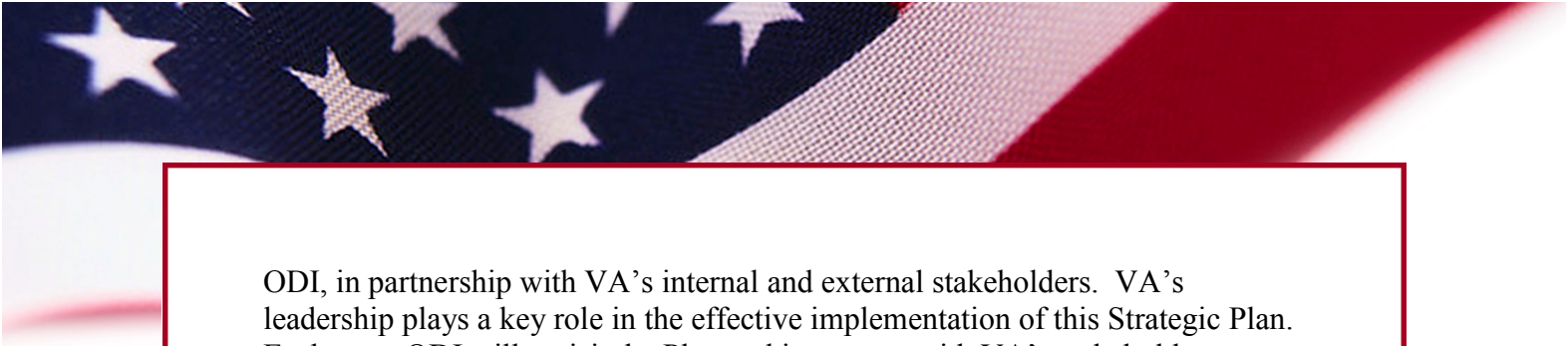
### **Goals**

The following primary goals have been identified in pursuit of this mission:

1. Create a diverse, high performing workforce that reflects the communities we serve by identifying and eliminating barriers to equal opportunity.
2. Cultivate an inclusive workplace that enables full participation through strategic outreach and retention.
3. Promote accountability, education, and communication on diversity and inclusion matters with VA employees, leaders, and stakeholders to facilitate outstanding service to Veterans.

### **Implementation**

The following pages present the programmatic objectives, strategies, and measures designed to achieve the identified goals. The *Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan* is intended to be a multi-year effort and is not intended to be a static document as changing conditions will likely require refinement to the strategies published here. Implementation of this Plan will be led by the staff of



ODI, in partnership with VA's internal and external stakeholders. VA's leadership plays a key role in the effective implementation of this Strategic Plan. Each year, ODI will revisit the Plan and in concert with VA's stakeholders, evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies outlined here in a *Diversity and Inclusion Annual Performance Report*.

## **GOALS, OBJECTIVES & STRATEGIES**

### **Goal 1**

Create a diverse, high-performing workforce that reflects the communities we serve by identifying and eliminating barriers to equal opportunity.

### **Objective 1A**

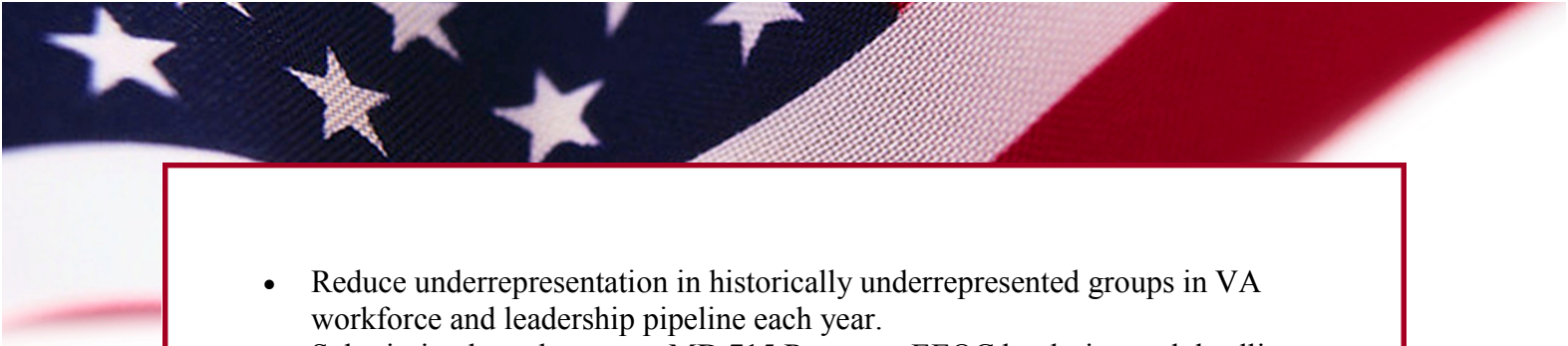
Identify underrepresentation in the VA workforce in accordance with equal employment opportunity (EEO) laws, regulations, and management directives.

### **Strategies**

- Analyze workforce demographic data in comparison with the Relevant Civilian Labor Force (RCLF) to identify triggers and potential barriers to equal employment opportunity.
- Compile data, conduct annual barrier analysis, and submit annual EEO Plan and Program Status report to Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in compliance with Management Directive 715 (MD 715).
- Compile data and submit Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Report (FEORP) to Office of Personnel Management (OPM).
- Compile workforce diversity data for Monthly Performance Reviews (MPR) for agency leadership.
- Conduct monthly technical assistance meetings with agency EEO and diversity managers and annual briefings with agency leadership on MD 715 planning and reporting.
- Conduct individualized live and virtual MD 715 EEO Plan technical assistance conferences with all VA subcomponents.
- Provide ad hoc workforce diversity reports and trends analyses to internal and external stakeholders.
- In partnership with key business process owners, identify and implement an automated applicant flow/adverse impact analysis system to identify barriers to equal opportunity in the selection process.

### **Measures**

- Reduce number of historically underrepresented groups in the VA workforce.

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- Reduce underrepresentation in historically underrepresented groups in VA workforce and leadership pipeline each year.
  - Submit timely and accurate MD 715 Report to EEOC by designated deadline each year.
  - Submit timely and accurate FEORP Report to OPM by designated deadline each year.
  - Provide monthly performance report (MPR) updates and quarterly workforce analyses on EEO program metrics to agency leadership by 2009.
  - ODI will provide ad hoc workforce diversity reports and trends analyses within five business days of request.
  - Improve quality of agency sub-component and facility level EEO plans and reports.
  - Identify appropriate applicant flow data system by 2010 and implement applicant flow data system by 2012.

### **Objective 1B**

Develop strategies to address underrepresentation and eliminate identified barriers to equal employment opportunity.

### **Strategies**

- Analyze workforce data to determine if promotions, awards, recognitions, training, and upward mobility opportunities are occurring equitably.
- Benchmark “best practices” in recruitment outreach strategies in the field and provide consultation service to field components.
- Assess attrition rates and develop models to support diversity in succession planning efforts.
- Collaborate with Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) to design and administer employee exit surveys six months after employee leaves the organization.
- Analyze exit survey data to identify trends and potential EEO related root causes for attrition.
- Analyze employee separation data to identify triggers for barriers to equal opportunity.

### **Measures**

- ODI will respond to requests for data analysis on promotions, awards, recognitions, training, and upward mobility opportunities within five days of initial request.

- ODI will provide customized guidance to VA Administrations, VA Central Office (VACO), and field components annually in first quarter of fiscal year MD 715 to support their MD 715 EEO planning efforts.
- Provide timely workforce data and technical assistance in support of VA succession planning efforts as requested.
- Implement pilot delayed exit surveys in FY 2010.
- Reduce “regrettable losses” (i.e, pre-retirement age separations) of employees in mission critical occupations agency-wide.

### **Objective 1C**

Maintain state-of-the-art EEOC-compliant standardized workforce analysis system to efficiently support the agency’s workforce data management needs.

### **Strategies**

- Continually upgrade and enhance VSSC to remain accurate, legally compliant, and user-friendly to aid managers in workforce planning efforts.
- Train and facilitate EEO managers on the use of the VHA Support Service Center workforce analysis system (VSSC) VA-wide.
- Perform random quality assurance checks on VSSC workforce data accuracy.
- Utilize variety of communications tools to distribute workforce analysis information (newsletter, video, CDs, Web site).

### **Measures**

- Produce reliable and accurate workforce analysis tables in support of the MD 715 planning.
- Receive accurate, responsive, and reliable EEO plans and reports from VA Administrations and VACO.
- Reduce number of MD 715 EEO Program Status Report deficiencies cited by EEOC.



## **Goal 2**

Cultivate an inclusive workplace that enables full participation through strategic outreach and retention.

### **Objective 2A**

Promote strategic recruitment outreach in order to maintain a competent, committed, and diverse workforce.

#### **Strategies**

- Conduct Technical Assistance Reviews (TARs) at agency facilities to address EEO program strengths and deficiencies and perform follow-up activities to ensure responsive corrective actions are implemented.
- Provide guidance to agency Administrations, VACO, and field components on best practices in recruitment outreach strategies.
- Partner with OHRM and Office of Resolution Management (ORM) in conducting consolidated technical assistance on-site reviews.
- Provide training and guidance in the area of Special Emphasis Programs (SEP) and related mandated reports.
- Compile data and information for annual submission of Federally mandated SEP/diversity related reports (e.g., Hispanic Employment in Federal Government, Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action Program, etc.)
- Design educational programs and outreach campaigns to promote science, medical, technology, engineering, and math occupations in diverse communities.
- Develop strategic partnerships and collaborations with community organizations, public and private agencies, affinity groups, professional associations, and educational institutions to promote recruitment outreach to underrepresented populations.
- Develop Recruitment Outreach and Selection Process Guide providing guidance on conducting a barrier-free and EEO-compliant selection process and citing strategic use of special hiring authorities for underrepresented groups.
- Administer Community Prosperity Partnership (CPP) to leverage community resources for outreach to underrepresented communities.
- Establish a full-time EEO Manager position in VACO.

## **Measures**

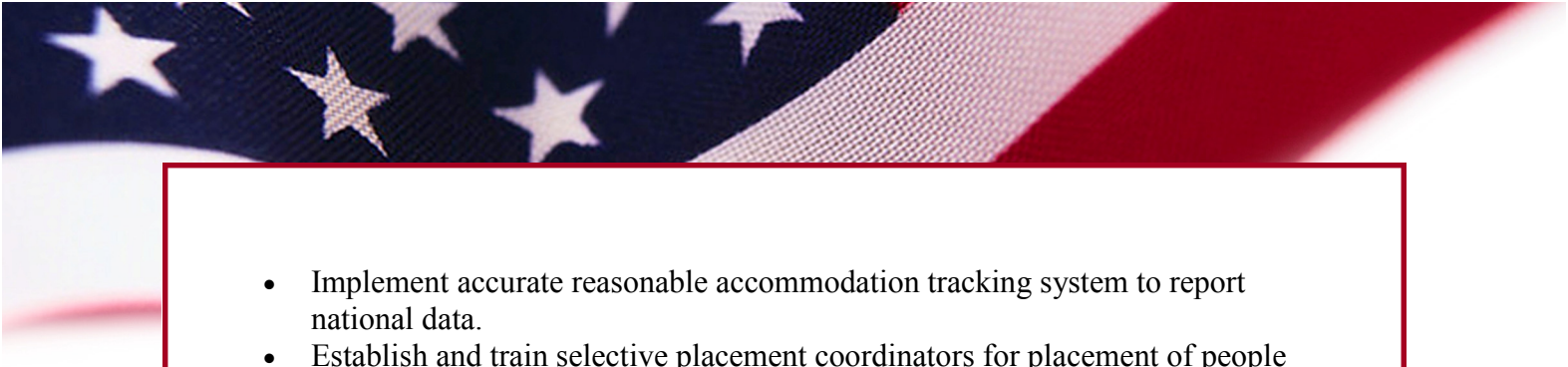
- Perform a minimum of six TARs on an annual basis at facilities based on established multidimensional needs assessment criteria.
- Perform follow-up to TARs within six months of initial visit to monitor progress on implementation of recommended corrective actions.
- Provide Issue updated guidance to agency subcomponents on “best practices” in recruitment outreach strategies in first quarter of fiscal year.
- Develop a TAR tracking system to ensure continuity in recommending best practices.
- Provide SEP training at 20 percent of the facilities by end of FY 2013.
- Submit timely and accurate SEP/diversity-related Federally mandated reports to oversight agencies by designated deadlines each year.
- Distribute SEP announcement memoranda to agency subcomponents annually and 30 days in advance of the SEP event.
- Participate in six national affinity group conferences or outreach venues annually.
- ODI will coordinate three CPP events annually based in diverse, underrepresented communities.
- ODI will issue Recruitment Outreach and Selection Process Guide by end of FY 2009.
- Establish a baseline for the purpose of measuring and improving diversity in applicant pools in underrepresented areas by 2012.
- Increase representation of people with targeted disabilities to 2 percent of the agency workforce by 2013.
- Reduce EEO complaints based on non-selection through appropriate EEO training for managers and supervisors.
- Recruit EEO Manager for VACO by 2010, budget permitting.

## **Objective 2B**

Support the retention and full participation of employees in order to provide high-quality service to Veterans and their families.

## **Strategies**

- Analyze Federal Human Capital Survey (FHCS) and Annual Employee Survey (AES) data to identify trends with regards to diversity and inclusion.
- Coordinate with national selective placement services to place applicants/employees with disabilities.

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- Implement accurate reasonable accommodation tracking system to report national data.
  - Establish and train selective placement coordinators for placement of people with disabilities utilizing Schedule A Hiring Authorities.
  - Improve partnership and build strategic alliances with OHRM on EEO, diversity, and inclusion issues.

### **Measures**

- Increase retention of historically underrepresented groups in VA workforce and mission critical occupations.
- Increase favorable responses to diversity related items on employee surveys over prior year baselines.
- Implement automated reasonable accommodation tracking system by FY 2010.
- Identify baseline and increase timeliness of processing of reasonable accommodation requests by 2010.
- Produce one marketing/promotional material on reasonable accommodation requests by end of FY 2009.
- Reduce EEO complaints based on failure to accommodate through appropriate EEO training of managers and supervisors.
- Establish selective placement coordinator function in all facilities by FY 2010; provide initial training in FY 2010.
- Implement monthly strategy meetings between ODI and OHRM key staff in FY 2009.

### **Objective 2C**

Create a diverse pipeline for recruitment and career advancement opportunities in order to support agency succession planning and leadership development.

### **Strategies**

- Coordinate agency-wide student non-traditional internship programs, including but not limited Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education, American Indian Science and Engineering Society, Washington Internships for Native Students, Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP), The Washington Center for Internships and Academic Seminars, International Leadership Foundation.
- Create a national internship database for tracking the recruitment of

nontraditional programs and track credit in database and on Standard Federal 50 forms.

- Develop mentoring program framework and coaching toolkit to support diversity in succession planning.
- Monitor Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP) and Leadership VA (LVA) candidate selection processes to ensure there are no barriers to equal opportunity.
- ODI will collaborate with OHRM to develop a diversity focused marketing/outreach plan to market the SES CDP and LVA programs.
- Send VA SES job opportunity announcement to diversity organizations through diversity listserv.
- Include voluntary race, gender, ethnicity disclosure form with all SES vacancies to anonymously track diversity of leadership applicant pool.
- Develop Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with diverse institutions of higher education and professional organizations to facilitate recruitment outreach to underrepresented groups.
- Develop guide on conducting EEO compliant selection process, including legally compliant ways to incorporate diversity in selection panels.
- In conjunction with OHRM, increase use of “open continuous” database in mission critical occupational.

### **Measures**

- Sponsor 20 WRP and 50 HACU interns annually.
- Convert 5 percent of qualified, sponsored WRP students utilizing special hiring authorities (e.g., Schedule A, 30 percent disabled Veterans) annually, subject to availability of budget resources.
- Establish a non-traditional internship database by end of FY 2009.
- Establish a guide and materials on mentoring and coaching to improve retention and enhance diversity in leadership pipeline by FY 2011.
- Increase marketing and outreach for leadership development programs such as SESCO and LVA.
- Increase number of internships, work-study cooperative arrangements, and student/faculty exchanges under MOUs.
- Issue guidance on conducting EEO compliant selection processes by FY 2010.
- Develop open continuous database for diverse candidates in mission critical occupational categories by FY 2011.



### **Goal 3**

Promote accountability, education, and communication on diversity and inclusion matters with VA employees, leaders, and stakeholders to facilitate outstanding service to Veterans.

#### **Objective 3A**

Develop agency policies that ensure commitment to and accountability for maintaining a diverse workforce and inclusive workplace.

#### **Strategies**

- Develop consolidated EEO, Diversity & Inclusion, and No FEAR Policy and related guidance in coordination with process owners.
- Develop and implement VA Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Strategic Plan.
- Develop VA Annual Diversity & Inclusion Performance Report.
- Implement office name change from “Office of Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity” (DM&EEO) to “Office of Diversity and Inclusion.”
- Develop recommended performance elements addressing EEO, diversity and inclusion in management and supervisory performance plans.
- Update reasonable accommodation and accessibility (RA) policy directive; and provide timely and effective (RA) guidance and training.
- Establish local reasonable accommodation coordinator function throughout agency.
- Develop and implement VA Diversity and Inclusion Awards program.
- Benchmark best practices for diversity and inclusion.
- Develop and implement diversity product surveys.

#### **Measures**

- Issue consolidated EEO, Diversity & Inclusion, and No FEAR Policy and related guidance annually and within 6 months of appointment of new Secretary.
- Develop and implement initial D&I Strategic Plan in FY 09; update Strategic Plan no later than FY 2014.
- Issue first VA D&I Annual Performance Report by January 2010; issue succeeding Annual Reports within 100 days of the close of the reported fiscal year.

- Publish and market best practices in diversity and inclusion by end of FY 2009.
- Promulgate office name change to “Office of Diversity and Inclusion” by FY 2009.
- Establish recommended EEOC MD 715 compliant diversity and inclusion performance element for SES, supervisors, and manager performance plans by FY 2010.
- Issue new agency-wide Reasonable Accommodation Directive by May 2009.
- Begin training of reasonable accommodation coordinators in FY 2010.
- Increase nominations for Diversity and Inclusion Awards by FY 2009.

### **Objective 3B**

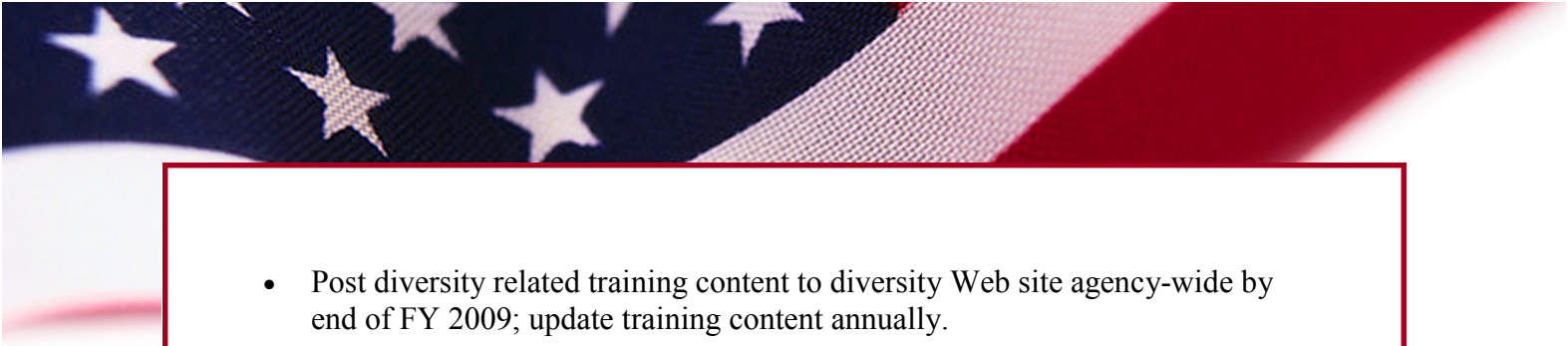
Educate employees and managers on EEO, diversity, and inclusion matters to promote competency in maintaining a fair, high-performing, and healthy work environment.

### **Strategies**

- Develop minimum standards for diversity, EEO, and conflict management training for all managers and supervisors.
- Evaluate and update EEO, Harassment, No FEAR, and diversity related training for employees.
- Develop and conduct training on Business Case for Diversity, including diversity of thought and perspective in workforce, internal operations, and service delivery.
- Add content of the business case for diversity and inclusion to the ODI inclusion Web site.

### **Measures**

- Develop VA-wide standards for recurring diversity, EEO, and conflict management training (content and delivery) for managers and supervisors by end of FY 2009; implement supervisory training by FY 2010.
- Train supervisors/managers in diversity, EEO, and conflict management annually in accordance with timeframes contained in VA policies and directives.
- Conduct training on Business Case for Diversity and Inclusion at a minimum of four leadership venues annually beginning in FY 2009.
- Reduce VA’s per capita rate of EEO complaints through appropriate EEO and diversity training.

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- Post diversity related training content to diversity Web site agency-wide by end of FY 2009; update training content annually.

### **Objective 3C**

Promote effective communication with employees and stakeholders on diversity and inclusion issues to heighten awareness and share best practices.

#### **Strategies**

- Implement VA Diversity Advisory Council and provide coordination and staff support.
- Redesign ODI Web site to feature more content in a user-friendly format.
- Enhance format and informational content of *Diversity@Work* newsletter.
- Enhance educational format and content of *Diversity News* video broadcast.
- Electronically disseminate educational articles in the area of diversity and inclusion on *NewsLink*.
- Develop systems to track viewership of communications vehicles and establish baseline measures.
- Monitor responses on diversity related survey items on FHCS and AES; participate in develop of diversity related items as appropriate.
- Develop a survey for recipients of diversity products to measure their effectiveness.
- Develop and distribute marketing materials on diversity and inclusion.

#### **Measures**

- Standup VA-wide Diversity Advisory Council by FY 2009 and provide staff support as needed.
- Redesign ODI Web site by FY 2010.
- Increase electronic distribution of *Diversity@Work* newsletter annually.
- Establish baseline of *Diversity News* viewership on diversity Web site by end of FY 2009, and increase viewership by 5 percent in FY 2010.
- Increase distribution of diversity related Web-based *NewsLink* annually.
- Increase favorable responses to EEO and diversity related survey items in employee surveys (FHCS or AES) beginning in FY 2010.
- Majority of respondents to diversity product surveys indicate understanding of business case for diversity and inclusion.
- Implement at least one diversity and inclusion initiative annually agency-wide beginning in FY 2010.



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